

On Plate LXVI. are arranged a great variety of conventional leaves and flowers from illuminated MSS. Although many of them are in the originals highly illuminated, we have printed them here in two colours only, to show how possible it is to represent in diagram the general character of leaves. By adapting these leaves or flowers to a volute stem, almost as many styles in appearance could be produced as there are separate ornaments on the page. By a combination of different varieties, they might be still further increased, and by adding to the stock by conventionalising the form of any natural leaf or flower on the same principle, there need be no limit to an artist's invention.

In Plates LXXI., LXXII., LXXIII., we have endeavoured to gather together types of the various styles of ornamental illumination from the twelfth to the end of the fifteenth century. There is here, also, evidence of decline from the very earliest point. On Plate LXXI. the letter N is not surpassed by any example in the subsequent styles we have reproduced. Here the true purpose of illumination is fulfilled; in every way, it is pure decorative writing. The letter itself forms the chief ornament; from this springs a main stem, sweeping boldly from the base, swelling out into a grand volute exactly at the point best adapted to contrast with the angular line of the letter; this is beautifully sustained again by the green volute, which embraces the upper part of the N, and prevents it falling over, and is so nicely proportioned that it is able to sustain the red volute which flows from it. The colours, also, are most beautifully balanced and contrasted; and the way in which the rotundity of the stems is expressed, without attempting positive relief, is a fruitful lesson. There are an immense number of MSS. in this style, and we consider it the finest kind of illumination. The general character of the style is certainly Eastern, and was probably a development of the illumination of the Byzantines. We believe that, from its universal prevalence, it led to the adoption of the same principle so universally in the ornamentation of the Early English which follows exactly the same laws in the general distribution of form.

This style, from constant repetition, gradually lost the peculiar beauty and fitness which it had derived from first inspiration, and died out by the scroll-work becoming too minute and elaborate, as we see in No. 13 of the same plate. We have no longer the same balance of form, but the four series of scrolls repeating each other most monotonously.

From this period we no longer find the initial letters forming the chief ornament on the page, but the general text becomes enclosed either in borders round the page, as at No. 1, Plate LXXII., or with tails on one side of the page, such as 9, 10, 11, 12. The border gradually comes to be of more importance, and from the vignette form which was at first general, we gradually arrive through the manner of No. 15 to that of Nos. 7 and 2, where the border is bounded on the outer edge by a red line, and the border is filled up by intermediate stems and flowers, so as to produce an even tint. No. 8 is a specimen of a style very prevalent in the fourteenth century, and which is very architectural in character. It is generally to be found on small missals, and surrounding very beautiful miniatures.

The gradual progress from the flat conventional ornament, Nos. 13 and 14, to the attempt at rendering the relief of natural forms in Nos. 15, 7, 2, will readily be traced through Nos. 9, 10, 11. There is also to be remarked a gradual decline in the idea of continuity of the main stems, and although each flower or group of leaves in Nos. 15, 7, 2, may still be traced to their roots, the arrangement is fragmentary.

Up to this period the ornaments are still within the province of the scribe, and are all first outlined with a black line and then coloured, but on Plate LXXIII. we shall find that the painter began to usurp the office of the scribe; and the farther we proceed the more does the legitimate object of illumination seem to be departed from.

We have the first stage in No. 5, where a geometrical arrangement is obtained with conventional

ornament enclosing gold panels, on which are painted groups of flowers slightly conventionalised. In 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, we find conventional ornament intermingled with natural flowers arranged in a fragmentary way. All continuity of design being abandoned, we arrive through this to No. 11, when a natural flower and a conventional ornament appear on the same stem, to Nos. 12, 13, where the painter has full sway, and represents flowers and insects casting their shadow on the page. When the art of illumination had arrived at this stage it could go no farther,—all ideality had fled—and it ends in the desire to copy an insect so faithfully that it should appear to be alighting on the page.

Nos. 1, 2, are specimens of a peculiar style of Italian MSS., which was a revival in the fifteenth century of the system of ornament so prevalent in the twelfth. It led to the style No. 3, where the interlaced pattern became highly coloured on the gold ground. This style also died out in the same way, the interlacings, from being purely geometrical forms, became imitations of natural branches, and, of course, when it arrived thus far there could be no further progress.

The character of the ornament on stained glass appears to follow much more closely that of the illuminated MSS. than it does the sculptured ornament of the monuments of the same period, and, like the ornament, of the illuminated MSS., it appears to us to be always in advance of structural ornament. For instance,—the stained glass of the twelfth century possesses the same breadth of effect, and is constructed in the same way as the sculptured ornament of the thirteenth, whilst the stained glass of the thirteenth century is, according to our view, already in a state of decline. The same change has taken place which we have already observed on comparing No. 13 with No. 12, Plate LXXI.

The constant repetition of the same forms has gradually led to an over-elaboration of detail, from which the general effect considerably suffers. The ornaments are out of scale with the general masses. Now as it is one of the most beautiful features of the Early English style, that the ornament is in such perfect relation in point of scale and effect to the members which it decorates, this seems a very curious fact, if fact it is. On Plates LXIX. and LXIX*, all the ornaments from No. 12 to 28 are of the twelfth century. Nos. 3 and 7 are of the thirteenth. Nos. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, are of the fourteenth, and we think a mere glance at the general effect of the plates will establish what we have here advanced.

In the stained glass of the twelfth century we shall always find all the principles which we have shown to belong to a true style of art. We need only call attention here to the very ingenious way in which the straight, the inclined, and the curved, are balanced and contrasted in all the diapers.

In Nos. 2 and 4 we have an example of a very common principle, which is thoroughly Eastern in character, viz., a continuous ground pattern forms a tint interlacing with a more general surface pattern.

In Nos. 1, 5, 6, 8, of the fourteenth century we see the commencement of the direct natural style, which ended in the total neglect of the true principles of stained glass, when both ornaments and figures through which life was to be transmitted, in the attempt to render them over-true, had their own shades and shadows.